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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: FATAH NEGOTIATOR ON PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

REF: JERUSALEM 1891

Classified By: CG Daniel Rubinstein for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (S) Summary. Fatah knew in advance that Hamas would not agree to an Egyptian draft proposal for Palestinian reconciliation by an Egyptian-imposed October 15 deadline, according to lead Fatah negotiator Azzam al Ahmad, and Fatah retracted its own agreement after the deadline passed. Now, Abu Mazen wants the GOE to turn up the pressure on Hamas, while holding off for a month on substantive re-engagement. Al Ahmad described to Polchief several scenarios which could unfold if no deal is reached before Palestinian elections next January. He encouraged the USG to reinforce the following points with the GOE: (1) Egypt should discard the current text before re-engaging with the factions; (2) nothing should dilute the PLO's prior commitments with Israel; and (3) Egypt should drop the idea of a "joint liaison committee" to coordinate between the PA and Hamas institutions in Gaza. End Summary.

Fatah Negotiator Describes  
Calculated Brinksmanship  
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¶2. (S) In a meeting October 28 with Polchief, lead Fatah negotiator Azam al Ahmad provided a post-mortem on the last round of factional reconciliation talks (Ref A), as well as his views on the way forward. Al Ahmad began by recounting his version of the events leading up to an October 15 GOE deadline to sign a draft reconciliation agreement. He said that he delayed providing Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) officials the signed draft until just before a midnight deadline, to minimize the risk that Hamas would also sign before the deadline and a deal would be reached. Al Ahmad claimed that Fatah knew in advance that Hamas would not sign, due to strong objections from Gaza-based Hamas military wing commander Ahmed Ja'bari, as well as opposition from Syria and Iran. When Hamas did not come forward by the midnight deadline, al Ahmed said, Fatah's approval of the reconciliation text became null and void. "We were clear with the Egyptians that we are no longer bound by their draft, and want to begin (from a new text)," he said, adding that he hoped USG interlocutors would reinforce this point in their own dealings with the GOE.

Reconciliation Remains Precondition  
to Elections, Palestinian State  
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¶3. (S) Al Ahmad then digressed into an analysis of Fatah's strategy on reconciliation and elections. He said pointedly, "there can be no state without reconciliation." Elections cannot be held without Hamas' agreement, and there are limits to how far PM Fayyad's statebuilding effort can progress without "ending the division" between the West Bank and Gaza. While he acknowledged that Fatah and Hamas have fundamental differences on their social agendas, and "do not know how to coexist," nonetheless a way must be found to hold elections.

Comment: While al Ahmad is Abu Mazen's sole negotiator on the reconciliation file, in the past we have found his views on reconciliation slightly more forward leading than his boss's own, and the weight of his positions on issues other than reconciliation is unknown. End Comment.

¶4. (S) Turning to the GOE, al Ahmad said that Abu Mazen had asked President Mubarak to "slow down" its efforts for a month during their October 20 meeting in Cairo. Abu Mazen also asked the GOE to apply pressure on Hamas, including denying its leaders permission to transit the Rafah crossing into Egypt, to hinder their ability to coordinate with friendly Arab governments.

#### Election Scenarios If No Deal Emerges

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¶5. (S) Looking ahead, al Ahmad said December would be a pivotal moment for the reconciliation issue. Abu Mazen had "no choice" but to issue a decree calling for elections on October 24, ninety days prior to the scheduled election date, as required by Palestinian law. However, absent a reconciliation deal, elections cannot be held, he said, because Hamas would not facilitate the work of the independent Central Elections Commission (CEC) in Gaza. Note: Hamas publicly denounced Abu Mazen's election decree almost immediately after it was issued. End note.

¶6. (S) If no deal is reached, there are several scenarios Fatah could pursue, he claimed:

---Some advisors close to Abu Mazen are considering the

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option of West Bank-only elections, but al Ahmad dismissed the idea as politically unviable.

---Another possibility is to secure Arab League agreement to a delay, after which the Palestinian factions would request that Abu Mazen amend his election decree.

---A third scenario involved waiting until Hamas takes its first step to prevent the CEC from organizing elections, such as threatening elections workers with arrest. At that point, he said, the PLO Central Council could convene one month prior to elections (December 24) to address the issue. Since the PLO created the Palestinian Authority, it could use its position as the higher authority to ask Abu Mazen to govern in his capacity as PLO Chairman beyond the election date.

Comment: Several interlocutors have told Post that a fourth scenario is under consideration. The idea, which contacts attributed to the People's Party, involves using Abu Mazen's position as "President" of the virtual State of Palestine (which Yasir Arafat declared in 1988) as the source of his legitimacy beyond January. End comment.

#### Message to USG

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¶7. (S) Finally, al Ahmad said it would be useful for the USG to reinforce three messages in its discussions with the GOE on the reconciliation issue. First, the GOE should shelve its current draft agreement and start anew, based on areas of agreement between the factions in previous rounds. Second, he expressed concern over anything that could be seen as diluting previous PLO commitments (i.e., toward Israel). Third, he urged the USG to press the GOE to drop its proposed "joint liaison committee" concept altogether. Comment: Although he did not go into detail in this particular conversation, in the past, al Ahmad and other Palestinian interlocutors have previously expressed their concern that this committee - which would interface between the PA in Ramallah and Hamas institutions in Gaza - would confer a degree of legitimacy on the latter. End comment.

